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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF THE WAR
ON IRAQ IRAN MIDDLE EAST GLOBAL WARMING US-URUGUAYAN
FTA AL JAZEERA SIGNAL IN LATIN AMERICA AND PRESS
FREEDOM UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL 03/20/06

1. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Weekend newspapers lead with the third anniversary of the war on Iraq; anti-war demonstrations in different countries of the world; half a million protesters taking to the streets across France to demand the scrapping of a new law that could erode job security; Al Fatah leaders demanding Abbas to resign; UN war crimes tribunal ruling out Milosevic's poisoning; and a former Iraqi PM's statement that Iraq was already embroiled in civil war. Leading "Clarín" carries a column written by former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, headlined "India and the US are bringing their positions closer," in which he underscores that "India's expected cooperation with the US will be beneficial for the entire world." Daily-of-record "La Nación" reports that "Controversial TV network Al-Jazeera will open two offices in Latin America - one in Argentina and one in Venezuela."

2. OPINION PIECES AND KEY STORIES

- "The US is seeking the 'least negative' way out of Iraq"

Oscar Raul Cardoso, international analyst of leading "Clarín," opines (03/18) "... Washington has just announced its decision to hold talks with Iran, nothing less... in order to see whether the two countries can cooperate in reducing violence in Iraq. The Iranian government is a Shiite Islamic theocracy, and it has heavy influence on most Iraqi organizations... Tehran said it is willing to meet with USG representatives...

"... This decision was made during the same week Bush signed a national security order in which he singled out Iran as the main enemy of US global security interests...

"Perhaps, one should interpret the latest developments as an initial symptom that the Republican administration has understood that the occupation of Iraq cannot continue without a deadline, and that, beyond the military power, the situation is troubled enough to justify holding talks, perhaps even negotiations with an Iran that is often defined as an enemy."

- "Efforts"

Paula Lugones, international columnist of leading "Clarín," comments (03/20) "Yesterday, George W. Bush celebrated the third anniversary of 'the beginning of freedom in Iraq'... Donald Rumsfeld wrote that terrorism seems to be retreating in Iraq. And the USG spent the day denying that there is a civil war in Iraq."

"All this is a big effort of the White House in front of an audience that is increasingly mistrustful. According to a Pew Research Center opinion survey, 43% of Americans believe today that the US will fail in Iraq... And, while Bush is determined to show he has everything under control, 70% believe the president lacks a plan to put an end to this war that is getting out of his control."

- "Washington warns again about the Venezuela-Iran axis"

Conservative "La Prensa" reports (03/30) "The White House reiterated yesterday its concern over the progress made in Venezuelan-Iranian ties..."

"US Ambassador to Caracas William Brownfield insisted that the Islamic Republic 'is currently a major strategic security concern for us, and common sense dictates that any country linked to Tehran to a certain degree is part of that concern.'"

"According to Brownfield, 'No one should be surprised if my government, which feels threatened by some policies and decisions of Iran, takes these ties into account when drafting its national security

strategy.'"

- "Iraq, on the verge of civil war"

Daily-of-record "La Nación" reports (03/20) "Three years after the beginning of the US offensive in Iraq, the specter of a civil war hangs over the country, which is combined with violence and poverty and where, according to former Iraqi interim PM Iyad Allawi, the situation is verges on the 'point of no-return.'"

"While thousands of people took to the streets in several countries to protest the war, the White House's top brass defended the USG's policy in Iraq and said that a withdrawal of US troops would be the same as returning 'post-war Germany to the Nazis.'"

- "The US denies that Iraq is on the verge of civil war"

Business-financial "Ambito Financiero" (03/20) reports "On the eve of the third anniversary of the launching of the US-led invasion of Iraq, an international controversy was unleashed yesterday over whether civil war exists in the Arab country."

"Meanwhile, US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld sustained in a The Washington Post column that leaving Iraq now would be like returning post-war Germany to the Nazis again."

"During an interview with the BBC, former Iraqi PM Iyad Alawi underscored that 'If this is not civil war, then God knows what civil war is.' 'We are losing an average of at least 50-60 people every day all over the country.' Iraq is heading for the 'point of no return' in which 'it will collapse into pieces and sectarianism will spread all through the region.'"

- "Bush, Napoleon and bayonets"

Centrist newspaper "Perfil" carries an opinion piece by Rosendo Fraga, political analyst and head of Centro de Estudios Nueva Mayoría, who opines (03/19) "Three years after the invasion of Iraq, the US-led military operation was a direct success in the sense that, against most predictions, regular Iraqi troops were defeated.

"Politically, a democratic government was established after elections...

"In parallel, the operation has meant a failure regarding the governability of the country, which is beleaguered by escalating violence.

"... The most similar conflict to this is the European religious war of the 16th century between Catholics and Protestants... This conflict has a huge destabilizing impact. Iran, the biggest enemy of the US, has a Shiite majority and, therefore, in this conflict, it is an ally of those ruling Iraq, who are Washington's allies. The risk is that this conflict could spread to Islamic countries.

"In conclusion, three years after its invasion, Iraq confirms that the efficacy of military power, if it is not accompanied by a political, cultural, historic and religious view, reminds us of Napoleon's phrase that bayonets serve all purposes but for sitting on them."

- " Hamas presents its Cabinet and Israel increases its pressure on it"

Telma Luzzani, on special assignment in Jerusalem for leading "Clarín," writes (03/20) "Nothing fuels optimism in the Middle East. Just a few minutes after the Hamas leader, Ismail Haniyeh, delivered the list of future members of his Cabinet to the president of the Palestinian Authority, Abu Mazen, for his consideration, the Israeli government reiterated that 'it will reject any contact with a Hamas' terrorist government.

"It is a dead-end ally of hard resolution because the

leading actors in this drama (Hamas, Abu Mazen, Israel) have little maneuvering margin.

"... Economic asphyxiation is another measure of pressure that the West and Israel are wielding on Hamas. Yesterday, the UN released a report warning of a possible 'humanitarian crisis.'"

- "UK's long-range nuke plan"

Gwynne Dyer, columnist of liberal, English-language "Buenos Aires Herald," writes (03/20) "Last November, when Britain was having a public debate about the government's intention to proceed with a whole new generation of nuclear weapons that would last the country into the mid-21st century, I wrote a column in which I mocked Defense Secretary John Reid for not even knowing why he wanted the weapons... I think I owe him an apology. I think I now understand why he wanted the nuclear weapons, and why he was not willing to get specific about it...

"The new estimates of the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) for global warming during the 21st century range from a minimum of 2 degrees C to a maximum of 5.8 degrees. The planet has not been that hot since the start of the Eocene era 55 million years ago...

"These revised estimates are very bad news for most countries. If you are Spanish or Brazilian or Thai - or a US citizen, for that matter - most or all of your country is going to turn into a desert unless we all cut CO2 emissions radically starting yesterday. Indeed, at least two-thirds of the world's existing farmland would become sterile, and billions would have to move or die.

"These estimates will have no immediate impact in the US, where disbelief in climate change is still strong... President Bush's principal adviser on these matters, James Connaughton, recently expressed the view that we may be able to double the atmospheric concentration of CO2, perhaps even triple or quadruple it, without changing the climate (Physics and chemistry work differently on his planet). But elsewhere, some governments are paying close attention to the implications of all this."

- "Uruguay abandons the idea of reaching a deal with the US"

Business-financial "Ambito Financiero" (03/20) reports "Making a contribution to Brazil rather than to Argentina, and with certain disappointment with the Bush administration, Uruguayan President Tabare Vazquez asserted last week to Lula that he will abandon the idea of reaching an FTA with the US. This happened in the framework of Vazquez's official visit to Brasilia, in which Uruguay got certain support for the pulp mills issue.

"... According to Vazquez, only the delayed investment agreement is pending, whereby US capitals will receive special treatment in Uruguay.

"The reason for Uruguay's abandonment of an FTA with the US is that the US proposal to increase Uruguayan exports and annual sales had little impact. The US would not be willing to open its markets of maize, meat, wheat, dairy products, cheese and textiles much more than today. However, in order to reach a deal, the US asked Uruguay to liberalize its industrial and service imports and to abandon Mercosur in no more than 10 years.

"Seemingly, the lack willingness to bring together the positions between the two countries was what made Vazquez abandon the idea of reaching an FTA with the US."

- "Debate reappears on limits on press freedom"

Hugo Alconada Mon, Washington-based correspondent for daily-of-record "La Nacion," comments (03/18) "Termed

for years as an alternative, minor and opposition news channel, Al-Jazeera was focused on the Arab world. However, the announcement that it will launch its international signal in English revived a debate in the US on the limits of press freedom, business pressures, and patriotism.

"... Before the September 11 attacks, the USG praised its role as an independent channel in the Middle East, and companies like General Motors and Procter and Gamble advertised on it.

"... The Bush administration accused it of spreading terrorist propaganda, with videos of Osama bin Laden and other Al Qaeda leaders... US President George W. Bush termed Al Jazeera and other media as 'hateful propaganda' from the Middle East.

"Since early 2005, the current US Secretary of State,

Condoleezza Rice, and other high-ranking USG officials have chosen another strategy -using Al Jazeera to carry their message to the region. But, in private, criticism and pressures continue.

"Al Jazeera editors responded that they only do their job and recalled that in the Arab world, US mass media are seen as pro-US and based on biases against Muslims."

13. EDITORIALS

- "The UN and human rights"

An editorial in leading "Clarín" reads (03/20) "With majority support, which included our country's, and the US opposition, the UN General Assembly approved the creation of the Human Rights Council, which will succeed the UN Human Rights Committee.

"... During the Cold War, the US and the Soviet Union always supported the denunciation of human rights violations in antagonistic countries and vetoed those initiatives related to their own sphere of influence.

"... The UN Human Rights Committee has always been a sounding board for these kinds of situations in which the rights of peoples were trodden by their governments.

"The succeeding Human Rights Council will have to overcome the Committee's main shortfalls and avoid becoming an intervention tool that breaks all principles of judicial equality among States. It will have to issue international initiatives aimed at protecting human rights regardless of geo-political or economic interests."

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